calico beans- hilma

¼ lb bacon
1 lb hamburber
½ cup chopped onion
½ cup brown sugar packed
½ cup catsup
2 tbsp vinegar
1 tbsp prepared mustard
1 tsp salt
1 can lima beans
1 " kidney beans
1 " pork and beans

dice bacon, saute, add hamburgar and onion, cook until meat has lost redness, add remaining ingredients - mix well, turn into casserole and bake in slow oven at 300 for about 1½ hours

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Calico Beans — Hilma

Reflections

Jeffrey Hunt
August 27, 2026

This battered little recipe card came from my grandmother Blanche Dear — "Gramma Dear" — and was typed on the old Underwood she continued using well into the 1990s. Across the top are just three words: "calico beans- hilma." I'm guessing the card dates from sometime in the late 1960s or early 1970s.

Hilma was Hilma Bock, longtime owner of the Hi-Way Pharmacy in downtown Camas. The pharmacy was one of those places woven into everyday life in town, and Hilma's calico beans seem to have traveled just as widely. Versions of the recipe turn up again and again in Camas families, remembered from dinners, potlucks, holidays and gatherings of all kinds. The ingredients may shift a little from one recipe box to another, but the dish is immediately familiar.

And this particular copy was clearly used. The card is stained and splattered, the edges worn, the type beginning to fade in places. It looks exactly like what it was: a working recipe that spent years being pulled from a box, set on a kitchen counter, and returned again after dinner was over.

The recipe itself is wonderfully of its time — bacon, hamburger, onion, lima beans, kidney beans and pork and beans, with brown sugar, catsup, vinegar and mustard, all baked slowly together. It is rich, sweet, smoky, uncomplicated food, and it is easy to understand why people kept making it.

What gives the card its charm now is that tiny heading at the top. Hilma. That was enough. No explanation was necessary. Everyone involved knew exactly who she was and exactly which beans were meant.

Recipes like this have a way of carrying more than food with them. They carry kitchens, voices, gatherings, old stores downtown, family tables, and all those ordinary occasions that eventually become part of the texture of a place.

Calico beans were one of those dishes in Camas. Looking at this card now, it is almost possible to taste the card itself.